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EUGENE weekly

MARCH 7, 2024 • VOLUME 43 • NUMBER 5 • FREE EVERY THURSDAY!

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at the UO**
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Cyclone**
page 14

Short and (Bitter)sweet

A ROUNDUP OF THIS YEAR'S OSCAR-NOMINATED LIVE-ACTION SHORT FILMS

by Rick Levin
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**DISORIENT ASIAN
AMERICAN FILM
FESTIVAL OF OREGON**



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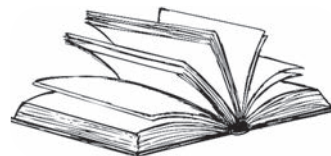
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Place numbers 1-9 so that each row,
column and 3x3 square has each number only once.

letters

BETTER CONSIDERED GOLDEN APPLES

It's the time of year when 4J is asking staff, students and community to nominate their favorite staff and volunteers. Historically, these Golden Apple awards (previously known as ACE awards) have gone to end-of-career educators, or educators at schools that have well-organized parent organizations. There are many talented, young, new and experienced teachers in the district that deserve to be recognized and galvanized by such an award.

It is disheartening to see this award go, year after year, to someone who doesn't need it. While all educators deserve recognition for their commitment, caring and skill, we need to focus on keeping talented teachers in the schools, teaching our children.

By continuing to award end-of-career educators, it is destroying the integrity and spirit that the award was meant to represent. This is just another example of the many ways that 4J makes choices that feel more political than helpful to Eugene's students.

I strongly urge 4J leadership to authentically and fully consider each nomination rather than just counting the number of votes, or honoring an end-of-career teacher, or choosing the winner based on improving optics for the district.

Carolyn Williams
Eugene

ROOTING FOR THE EMS

In response to last week's *EW*, it's clear how misinformed people are about the LCMUP/Ems Stadium project. This project will in no way detract from the dollars the county/city have already been given for homelessness. Lane County received \$74 million from ARPA in 2021-22, and \$13.8 million was to be used for homelessness. In 2023, they received \$22 million from the state for homelessness and another \$4.1 million from the feds. If your issue is homelessness, take it up with your county-city boards and how they are spending the money they already have. KidSports and YMCA have brand new facilities.

The \$15 million bond measure would cost the average homeowner \$25 per tax year. The project would greatly improve the Jefferson-Westside neighborhood. Those complaining about noise and light pollution should've re-thought living in downtown Eugene. Traffic will be no more an issue than it is during the logging show or the Lane County Fair — not an issue. I didn't buy a house in a city to live in a sleepy suburb. We've already lost Eugene Celebration, Art in The Vineyard, Willamette Valley Folk Festival, etc. Eugene is dying a slow death.

For the last three years, the Emeralds scouted multiple locations before landing on this one. PK Park was always temporary. Proposals were either rejected by the county-city or not approved by MLB. This is the approved site. There

are no offers to buy the team so it will literally just go away.

The community deserves this. The Emeralds deserve this. Vote Yes.

Liz Treacy
Jefferson-Westside homeowner
Eugene

NO EMS IN THE BACKYARD

No. No stadium at the Fairgrounds. Lane County has no right to change it to a stadium. The people of Lane County can only make that vote. One hundred million dollars can go to a more moral use in our county, not to just play a game. Go cry and buy a cow pasture to play in. That is a residential area; people live there. Would you want it in your backyard?

Lani Rookard
Springfield

MOVE TO THE HEART WITH HOMELESSNESS

Living in Eugene since 1973, I have experienced decades of responses to the issue of homelessness. Once again, the same two polarities are suiting up and putting on the gloves.

Those who see all people as deserving housing seek government policies. They believe this is the way to make a new reality. Homes for all (*EW* letters, Feb. 15).

Others believe that individual responsibility is an important factor to consider when working on homelessness. Personal failures are cited as elements in creating the problem (*EW* letters, Feb. 22).

Studies by United Way, surveys of housing availability, wages and rent comparison — facts come and go. Facts don't matter.

Let's move from the head to the heart. Look out your window on a rainy night. Are you warm and comfortable like me? I am a widow with my husband's retirement benefits from PERS. I wonder why others suffer while I have plenty. Perhaps our policies are unjust.

Let's work together. Remember, this nation began with "forceful protests."

Cindy Kokis
Eugene

WELCOME BACK WEEKLY

I had fallen out of the *Eugene Weekly* habit, but the reappearance of a print version after its recent absence caught my eye, so I grabbed one. The feel and smell of the paper over coffee was like a conversation with an old friend. A sterile screen is no match for the experience of analog media. The convenience of digital is deadly to local media because online everything is equally as close. Email and social media beckon. Media consumption is highly ritualistic, and once a habit gets broken, it is hard to re-establish it.

As an academic, I tried to warn the new *Register-Guard* editors of the danger of breaking that morning physical paper ritual in their rush to digital, to no avail. They raised rates on delivery and subscriptions plummeted. Cities, neighborhoods, cafes and brew pubs are

Jonesin' Crossword

BY MATT JONES
"They've Got Chemistry"
—multiple times, even.

Across

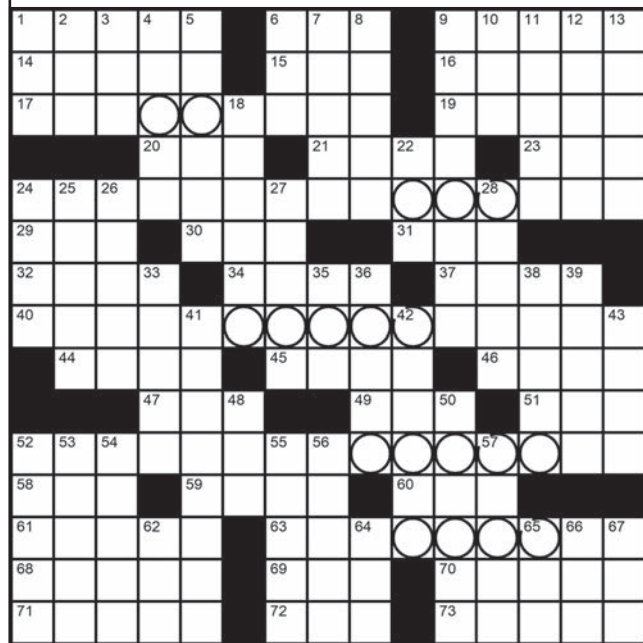
- Begs for kitty kibble
- Device that kept Blockbuster in business
- Can't-miss experiences
- Move slowly
- Random suffix
- "Ah, I'm such ___"
- Pre-Internet library feature
- Hooded snake
- "But before ___ ..."
- "Pet" that actually requires seeds
- Actor McDiarmid
- "Dang straight"
- Mini-albums, for short
- Word beginning a lot of Lil Wayne album titles

- Grass rolls
- Hacker's language, in the early aughts
- Leave off
- "Superstore" actor Santos
- Tutor's task
- Dispensers that may now be interactive
- Where frisbees may get stuck
- Fox show with choral versions of pop songs
- Columbus sch.
- 1970s-'80s sitcom planet
- Sick
- Browser issue that might slow your computer down
- Football position
- Like some gummy worms

- "Didn't I tell ya?"
- Second tries
- Tests of numerical aptitude
- Millionaire intro
- ___ Dew
- Former capital of Nigeria
- Observe secretly
- Up to now
- Comes down in a blizzard

Down

- 1200, to Tiberius
- Memorable period
- "___ the ramparts ..."
- Collective acknowledgement from a room of beatniks, maybe
- Coffee urn attachment
- Quick clip
- From Prague
- Singer Bebe
- Cheese partner
- Eerie flyer
- 1925 Edna Ferber novel
- Bar mitzvah reading
- Point of view
- "Man's ___" (viral 2018 song)
- Part of FWIW
- Reviewing website
- "Nixon in China," for example
- Fitness motto opening
- Less lurid
- Checking proof
- June Cleaver or Maggie Seaver, e.g.
- Lance of the O.J. trial
- Girl Scout group
- Eyelashes
- Deli counter qty.
- Ninja, e.g.
- In a new way
- Toothpaste options
- Colorful card game
- Poses to propose
- Contract conditions
- Outdo showily
- In a weird way
- Delicious
- Make speeches
- Like Whataburger's headquarters
- Prefix with scope
- Explosive compound
- Some time ___
- Cut (the lawn)
- Punctured tire sound



ANSWERS TO LAST PUZZLE
CALM CAB BRAHE
OREO WACO LUCAS
WEST AMMO UNLIT
HARPER LEGUME
SPEND SAILS
STARTOP DNA PGS
COLLEGESLAW LIU
ARTY NNE MUSE
MER NEWLY WARMED
PSY ETA SHAMBLE
SONYS IRISE
SHIPLA PHAPPY
MARTO AMBI ATOM
OKING ROUT GAVE
GLASSY KION TRAIN

physical places. They are where we meet to be in the community, and the vortex of the internet draws us away, whereas the physical medium is a part of it. The gutting of the *RG*, and the elimination of letters like this, was a disaster for Eugene and highlights the danger of investor-driven media. *Eugene Weekly* is one of our last tenuous grasps of a truly local press. So, as you read this, hopefully on paper in a cafe somewhere, savor the moment.

Ted M. Coopman
Eugene

AN EMBRYONIC VOTE

I am an embryo, and I vote!

Fred Denny
Springfield

NO CHURCH IN SCHOOLS

Many people in our community may be unaware that there are church services being conducted every Sunday morning at the Arts and Technology Academy, our local public middle school (also at other public schools in Eugene).

This activity felt, to me, like proselytizing, seducing young people to join and engage in a religion at a public school. This could easily be perceived as a school sponsored event.

Why does our 4J School Board allow this? Churches do not belong in public schools. Our schools should be funded to provide instruction in civics and American history and government that teach the founding principles of our Republic, including separation of church and state.

Margaret Moore
Eugene

A VOTE FOR KNUDSON

Like many *Eugene Weekly* readers, I've been active in the community for decades, and care deeply that we keep Eugene liveable, as well as expand opportunities for people who have been shut out. That's why I'm thrilled that Kaarin Knudson has stepped up to run for mayor. Knudson has not only proven her commitment to our city, she is already making a meaningful difference.

Knudson has deep Eugene roots. She has two degrees from UO and was a leading runner with the Ducks track team. She started a small business in Eugene and has children in 4J public schools. She is a licensed architect with more than 20 years' experience advancing sustainable design and community-led solutions. In 2017, she founded the housing advocacy organization Better Housing Together, to increase housing affordability, diversity and supply in Lane County. She advised on the implementation of Oregon's landmark middle housing laws and advocated for the creation of Eugene's Affordable Housing Trust Fund. I can't imagine a candidate with more proven commitment to solving our housing crisis.

Knudson is the leader we need: smart, respectful, and has proven she can bring people together for solutions. I have so much confidence in Knudson's ethics, intelligence and ability to get things done. Join me in voting for Knudson for mayor.

Joy Marshall
Eugene



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Local and Vocal

VIEWPOINT BY DAN BRYANT

When Life Begins

CREATION DOES NOT HAPPEN IN A SINGLE MOMENT, BUT THROUGH A CREATIVE PROCESS, MINISTER DAN BRYANT WRITES

We need to have a serious conversation about when life begins. It is a question that has very serious consequences for public policy. Chief Justice Tom Parker of the Alabama Supreme Court made it perfectly clear that the premise of the court's recent decision regarding frozen embryos was based on religious doctrine, writing, "Even before birth, all human beings bear the image of God."

Parker devoted eight pages of his opinion to Christian scripture and authors without a hint of recognition of differing religious viewpoints.

Note, people living in Biblical times did not think of conception the way we do. The genealogies of Jesus seldom mention mothers. Why? Aside from the patriarchal standards of the time, the assumption was that women were the fertile ground in which men planted their seed and hence children were descended from "the loins" of their fathers. Thus the author of Hebrews would claim that Levi "was still in the loins of his ancestors" generations before he was born.

Those like Parker like to claim that this country is founded on "Judeo-Christian" principles. I would note first that most Jews I know wish we would remove "Judeo" from that claim as they want nothing to do with most of the principles being so claimed. If the principles regarding conception were in fact inherited by Christianity from the Jewish tradition, then one would expect that Jewish tradition would show some evidence of treating the "unborn child" as a full human being with all associated rights. It does not. To the contrary, an injury that caused the loss of a fetus is not regarded as manslaughter in Hebrew scripture but as the loss of property (Exodus 21:22-25).

What is abundantly clear in that scriptural tradition is that life is associated with the breath of God. The creation tradition, Parker cites, couldn't be clearer when the first human being "became a living being," namely, when God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). It is most telling that the Chief Justice did not cite this particular verse of the creation tradition for he surely knows that it at least calls into question the whole notion of life beginning at conception if not undermining it altogether.

It is my most sincerely held religious belief that we are, as Parker also affirms, created in the image of God. And if we know anything about the created order, creation does not happen in a single moment, but through a creative process. Even if we take the Biblical story of creation as a literal account, which it surely is not, it is still a process over many days.

Psalm 139:13-15 has this beautiful image of our evolution in the womb: "You knit me together in my mother's womb... intri-

cately woven in the depths of the earth." I love that image of God knitting us into being, much the way my wife knit a baby blanket for our first grandchild, every stitch made with love.

I suspect many on the left are reluctant to make a case for life beginning at birth instead of conception because they also understand that human pregnancy, whether at one month or nine, involves something fundamentally more than a fertilized egg. Upholding the sanctity of life, however, does not require that we be forced to choose between binary options. The beginning of life is truly something equally miraculous and mysterious.

We should not shy from affirming the life at each stage of development from zygote (the fertilized egg) to a fully developed fetus. At each and every one of those moments life is beginning and therefore should be regarded with utmost care and respect.

At each and every one of those moments life is beginning and therefore should be regarded with utmost care and respect. But the blanket is not complete until the last stitch has been cast off and taken from the knitting needle.

But the blanket is not complete until the last stitch has been cast off and taken from the knitting needle. So I argue for the beginning of life as a process rather than an event, a process which does not end until the child is born. It is at that point, and only at that point, that what began months prior has now become a full human being, filled with the breath of life.

I fully expect U.S. laws to be neutral on religious doctrine. They should not promote any particular religious belief. That is why we have the First Amendment. The ruling of the Alabama Supreme Court is not only a threat to reproductive health — promoting one religious interpretation over another — it is a threat to religious freedom.

Dan Bryant is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and a resident of Eugene since 1991. The opinions of this article are his own and do not represent any organization with which he is affiliated. Find a longer version of this viewpoint at EmmausAlways.com/when-life-begins.

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Blackout

STUDENT NEWS OUTLETS
PEEL BACK SECRECY TO REVEAL
DRUGGING ALLEGATIONS
AT UO FRATERNITIES

By Eliza Aronson

On Feb. 10, two first-year women at the University of Oregon attended a party hosted by Phi Delta Theta, a fraternity near the UO campus. The women already had drinks in their hands when a male student — someone they knew and trusted — pushed new drinks on them. Their friend told the women the drinks were vodka and lemonade.

“It wasn’t even half of a Solo cup,” one of the women later recounted on Feb. 27 to KWVA, the UO campus radio station. “Thirty minutes later, I don’t remember anything at all.”

Both felt dizzy and nauseous — one of them vomited — before they blacked out.

The women believe they were roofied — slipped drinks spiked with a drug intended to knock them out. Drugging of women at college parties has been a growing concern at campuses across the U.S. According to a study published in the journal *Psychology of Violence* in 2017, an estimated 8 percent of college students reported being drugged without their knowledge, most of them women who say they also were later sexually assaulted.

The two women escaped the Phi Delt party thanks to a sober friend, who returned them safely home. But in the morning, the two say they had no recollection of how they got there.

Today, the women’s story is widely known across campus. The women have shared their accounts on TikTok and in an interview with KWVA. An upstart news site, *Anonymous Student News*, broke the story that Phi Delt and two other fraternities were under investigation for allegations of drugging, as well as doing their own interview with the women that posted before the KWVA radio interview.

But the scale of the problem is only now becoming clear. UO officials tell *Eugene Weekly* that since January, they have received reports of nine people “unknowingly ingesting substances that caused some level of incapacitation or need for medical care” while attending events sponsored by fraternities.



The wave of druggings at Greek parties may test the administration of UO’s new president, John Karl Scholz.

The UO said in its statement that in order to “protect the health and safety of the campus community, three organizations have been placed on interim suspension while the university investigates the allegations.” The fraternities include Phi Delt, which the UO suspended after the women’s allegations.

But it’s not clear if anyone is conducting a criminal investigation.

Drugging someone without their knowledge is a felony in Oregon, and the women who survived the Phi Delt party say in the interview with *Anonymous Student News* that they reported the incident to the Eugene Police Department.

When *EW* asked about the case, Eugene police spokeswoman Melinda McLaughlin referred questions to the University of Oregon Police Department. “UOPD is handling the investigation,” McLaughlin said in an email.

UOPD Captain Clint Dieball tells *EW* that his police department is not investigating any cases involving fraternities or druggings at Greek events. Dieball says

he doesn’t know why the Eugene police would send *EW* to his agency.

“That’s odd,” Diebal tells *EW*. “I’m not aware of any such reports.”

The UO says that the reported events occurred at off-campus locations, placing them in the legal jurisdiction of the EPD. UO officials say no associated criminal complaints have been filed with UOPD.

In an email to *EW*, the university said it is investigating these reports as potential violations of the student conduct code, but as of now, nothing has been substantiated.

Nicole Lasky is a criminal justice professor at Northeastern University whose research focuses on drugging and victimization.

Lasky says such cases too often fall under the control of universities instead of police.

“The issue really is that universities aren’t legal systems; they have their own sort of way of operating outside of our criminal justice system,” Lasky says. “I’m not sure how you can really increase transparency, operating under this kind of obscure system that our universities do.”

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SCAN HERE TO SEE OUR LIVE MENU

The women involved in the alleged roofie incident at Phi Delt didn't respond to *EW*'s requests for an interview. But they have described their experience in detail elsewhere.

According to what they told KWVA, the women woke up the following day, Sunday, Feb. 11, still feeling sick. Both were confused — neither had consumed enough alcohol to warrant their symptoms. They went to the emergency department at PeaceHealth's RiverBend Medical Center in Springfield.

The women told KWVA that a physician at RiverBend told them their symptoms suggested they had been roofied.

The term "roofied" comes from the spiking of drinks with Rohypnol, the brand name of flunitrazepam. The drug is a benzodiazepine — or "benzo"—which includes potent tranquilizers such as Valium and Xanax. Rohypnol, which is illegal in the U.S., is a common date-rape drug.

But being "roofied" extends to any substance that knocks someone out and affects their memory. Another commonly used rape drug, GHB, creates a sense of euphoria while bringing on amnesia.

The women told KWVA that RiverBend had only standard drug tests, which can't detect Rohypnol. Tests that might have shown they had ingested Rohypnol cost more than \$300 each. RiverBend confirmed it does not offer tests for Rohypnol.

The women said they then tried to go to the University Health Center, but it was closed since it was Sunday. The University Health Center doesn't offer walk-in drug tests. To be able to be tested, you have to make an appointment with a provider, who then can request labs. The health center suggested the women try Quest Diagnostics, a testing clinic. The women told KWVA that Quest Diagnostics couldn't run the tests because it had not received an order from RiverBend.

"I felt like it's all just been a really, really overly complicated process that has made us really angry," one of the women later told KWVA.

The next day, Feb. 12, they started posting about their experiences on TikTok.

Their posts soon got the attention of *Anonymous Student News*, a news site first launched in February. In an interview with *EW*, the site's founder and editor asked to go by their screen name, "Ako Fucus," to keep anonymity when criticizing the university student government,

which was the original motivation for the site.

Anonymous Student News has served as a source for news, interviews and unfiltered opinion, Fucus says. They also say the site's anonymity allows students to publish without retaliation about various topics, such as student government and campus protests.

On Feb. 20, *Anonymous Student News* broke the rumored news spreading on YikYak that the Interfraternity Council (IFC) had decided to suspend fraternities until the end of the term. The article also said that Phi Delt, Theta Chi and Delta Sigma Phi were facing disciplinary action for allegations regarding assaults and drugging.

The next day, IFC posted a statement on its Instagram, stating only that there would be a temporary suspension of social gatherings with alcohol. When *EW* reached out this week to the IFC for comment, members referred the paper to the Instagram post.

That same day, *Anonymous Student News* published another article, which said that an anonymous YikYak user said "that the IFC's decision to voluntarily enter social probation was a pre-emptive move taken before the university could enforce more stringent measures" such as disaffiliating or permanently removing all fraternities from campus. On Feb. 21, the *Daily Emerald* published a story on the decision, adding that the suspension of alcohol at fraternity events would last until April 15. KWVA broadcast its interview with the women six days after the *Emerald* story.

On Feb. 22, Oregon Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) posted on their Instagram, stating that over the last month the university had "received allegations of students unknowingly ingesting substances."

But the statement didn't reveal which fraternities had received allegations. Nor did the UO disclose how many people claimed to have ingested substances at fraternity parties.

While the statement didn't name the fraternities, the UO FSL eventually posted the names of fraternities under investigation or university sanction on its website.

However, by the UO's standards, which says that updates to the status of chapters will be posted within five business days, there have been delays in naming the fraternities.

The Greek Conduct Process and Chapter Status Report web page says it takes five business days to update news about fraternities.

UO officials say they suspended Delta Sigma Phi on Jan. 26 but took more than 20 days to disclose the decision. The UO suspended Phi Delt on Feb. 15, but it took 13 days before naming the fraternity on the website. It took only three days for the UO to disclose that it had also suspended Theta Chi.

The UO investigations could bring long-term consequences to fraternities hoping to remain in the school's Greek system.

However, three fraternity chapters went rogue after the UO in 2021 found them in violation of university codes, including rules that ban hazing and alcohol overconsumption. The fraternities — Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Alpha Sigma Phi and Kappa Sigma — continue to operate without sanction from the UO. An investigation substantiated that "multiple attendees" of a Sigma Alpha Epsilon party "consumed a controlled substance without their knowledge or consent, and attendees had to seek medical attention following the event." Alpha Sigma and Kappa Sigma were suspended for misconduct unrelated to drugging allegations.

The UO has issued a warning on the website about the disaffiliated fraternities: "The university strongly discourages maintaining or seeking membership in these organizations and has significant and serious concerns about the health and safety of our students and the university community if these organizations continue to recruit and operate."

For their part, the women told KWVA they wanted people to know what happened to them to prevent it from happening to others.

"I'm so lucky that nothing worse happened to me," one of the women told KWVA. "And the intention was probably much worse."

The women recalled a meeting in the UO Dean of Students office, where an official told them the university had seen a spike in cases of students reporting being drugged at parties. One of the women said the university official told them other victims were reluctant to speak out.

"A lot of them don't want to pursue further action out of a lot of reasons, which I totally understand," she said. "But it just makes it so hard for action to actually be taken."

The UO says anyone with additional information on these reports should contact the UO Office Of the Dean of Students at DoS.uoregon.edu/make-report. Chapter status updates are at DoS.uoregon.edu/fsl-status.

March 8-10



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slant

• *Eugene Weekly* went to print on Wednesday before the Eugene 4J School Board met March 6 to **make a decision on Superintendent Andy Dey's contract.** Go online for that update as well as for the story we posted on March 5 about the complaint filed against Dey by a South Eugene High School teacher for kissing her on the cheek without her consent.

• **Read any good articles lately?** We took a break from Super Tuesday updates in *The New York Times* to read the charming article in *The Gray Lady* about the brouhaha among fountain pen lovers over a limited edition ink — Dark Lilac — that was reintroduced but was not quite the right shade. Check out “Intrigue, Ink and Drama Grip the Fountain Pen Community” in the March 1 edition.

• **State Rep. Paul Holvey announced his retirement from the Oregon Legislature**

last week — the longtime legislator's intent to retire had been rumored before UFCW 555's weird and failed attempt to have him recalled last fall. Two local Dems have entered the race: Lisa Fragala, a Lane Community College Board director, recently announced her bid for the Democratic nomination for Oregon House District 8, which includes central, eastern and south Eugene, downtown, the University of Oregon and rural areas south of Eugene. Environmentalist Doyle Canning, who has tried to run several times against now-retired Congressman Peter DeFazio, also entered the race last week.

• Two questions have festered for years in college sports: **Are student-athletes employees at colleges and universities, and can they unionize?** The Dartmouth College men's basketball team voted 13-2 this week to test the waters and join SEIU Local 560. The Ivy League school is certain to appeal to the National Labor Relations Board, so it will take time, perhaps years, to determine a final answer. Yet with billions of dollars at play in college sports, this bears close scrutiny.

• **City Club of Eugene is looking at homelessness in Lane County** at the noon March 8 meeting at Carlita's restaurant in the Gordon Hotel. The county is coordinating its approach to homelessness through a state program called All In. Speakers are Terri Hsieh, street outreach manager for HIV Alliance, and Kate Budd, Human Services Division manager with Lane County Department of Health & Human Services.

• **The route to the Franklin Boulevard roundabouts continues.** Some like the concept and some not so much — but the data show roundabouts increase safety and decrease emissions. The latest news is that after five years and thousands of comments, the design concept is done and the engineering of phase one is underway. The goal for construction of phase one, which begins in 2026 at the earliest, includes continuous and separated facilities for walking, biking and rolling, two lanes for EmX, and the construction of two priority roundabouts.

SLANT INCLUDES SHORT OPINION PIECES, OBSERVATIONS AND RUMOR-CHASING NOTES COMPILED BY THE EW STAFF. HEARD ANY GOOD RUMORS LATELY? CONTACT CAMILLA MORTENSEN AT 541-484-0519, EDITOR@EUGENEWEEKLY.COM



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Express concerns to EWEB Commissioners@EWEB.org; attend EWEB board meetings 5:15 pm first Tuesday each month. Register online by 2pm if calling in.

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Fast and Furious

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A ROUNDUP OF THIS YEAR'S OSCAR-NOMINATED LIVE-ACTION SHORT FILMS By Rick Levin

When it comes to movies, cumbersome epics and endless sequels are alright, as far as they go — often altogether too far, really — but sometimes you want something fast and furious. You want a short story, or several in a row. You want to be punched in the gut, or moved to tears by the cinematic equivalent of a sad song.

It's always struck me as odd that short films don't get more play, or at least more recognition. It's not easy to pack so much into so little space, and when these shorties are done well, they can carry the impact of a feature film, with all that forms artistic beauty and grandeur of scope.

At least we have the annual tradition of the Oscar-nominated shorts, to remind us of the form's existence beyond the attention-grabbing appeal of endless Instagram clips. Without further adieu, then, here's the slate of this year's nominees for best live-action short films:

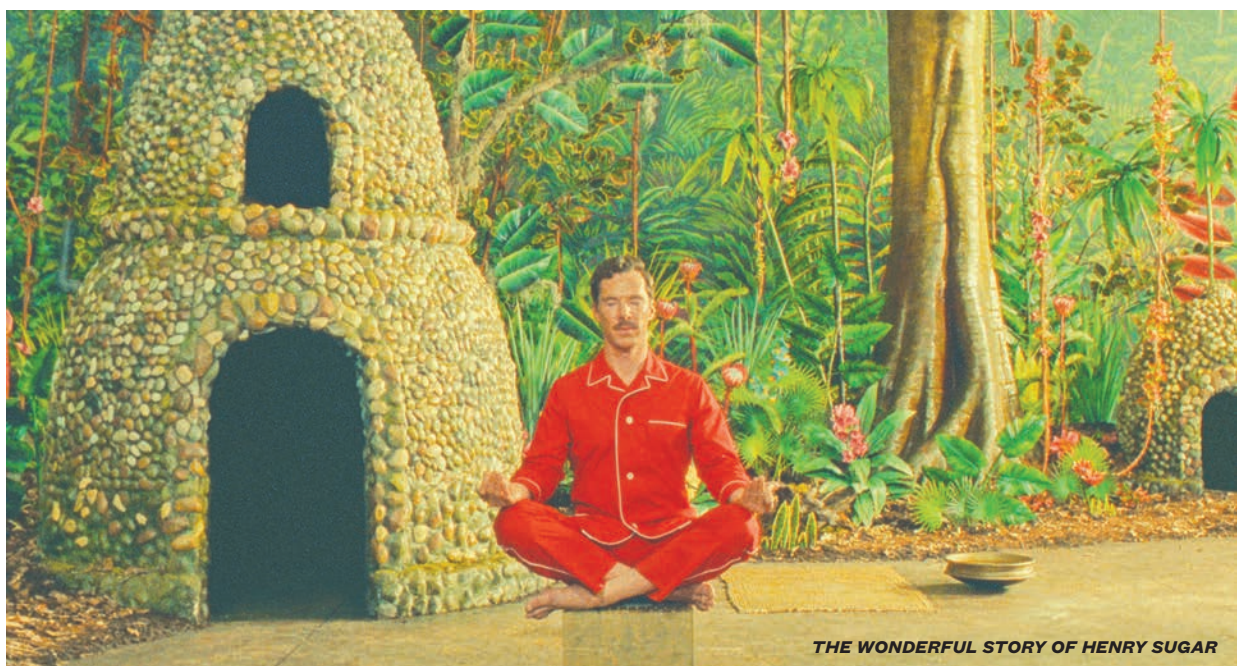
All art is propaganda, wrote the great British novelist George Orwell, though it should be added that not all propaganda is art. This thought crossed my mind several times while watching *Red, White and Blue* (U.S., 23 min.), a blunt but undeniably affecting short film written, directed and produced by Nazrin Choudhury. In it, a single mother, Rachel (Brittany Snow), travels from Arkansas to Missouri with her young daughter Maddie (Juliet Donenfeld) in tow. Financially strapped and legally handcuffed, Rachel — who already has another young son at home — is crossing state lines for an abortion.

Despite strong performances and an emotionally authentic script by Choudhury, the first half of the film has the feel of a particularly dire public service announcement:

For all its infuriating political ramifications, it plays out in a predictable manner, offering nothing new or revealing to the debate. There must be a twist, one thinks, and indeed, when that twist arrives, it arrives like a blow to the solar plexus. It would take a cold heart (or utter ideological derangement) not to be seriously flattened by the film's concluding scenes. A single, devastating message is delivered, and whatever nuance the story lacks is redeemed — nay, erased — by the outrage it conveys.

The Danish entry for Best Oscar, writer/director Lasse Lyskjær Noer's sublime *Knight of Fortune* (*Ridder*

Lykke, Danish and Norwegian with subtitles; 25 minutes) does exactly what a short film should do, and it does it to perfection. As it opens, Karl (Leif André) is visiting the chapel where his dead wife lies in state, but he can't bring himself to open the coffin after the undertaker's warning that her mouth may hang open a bit, and her skin might be yellowish. Overcome with fear and grief, Karl flees to the restroom, where — in a moment of tragicomic awkwardness — he meets Torban (Jens Jørn Spottag), another old man who confesses to being unable to hoist the lid on his own wife's coffin. He asks Karl to join him.



THE WONDERFUL STORY OF HENRY SUGAR

COURTESY 2024 SHORTS.TV

What ensues is a sad, funny, touching tale of grief, loneliness and, ultimately, the healing nature of human connection, odd and random as it may be. It is a beautiful piece of work, and stunningly rich considering the compactness of its narrative. Death need not be so scary and strange, it seems to say, though consolation for our losses may arrive in strange ways.

Unfortunately, for all the timeliness of its story, *The After* (U.K.; 18 minutes) is the weakest among this year's entries, though hardly without merit. Directed by Misan Harriman, with a screenplay based on Harriman's idea by John Julius Schwaback, this short film opens with a shocking act of public violence that robs a successful young man, Dayo (David Oyelowo), of both his wife and young daughter (Jessica Plummer, Amelie Dokubo), right in front of his eyes.

Numbed out by grief, the former exec now spends his time dodging friends and grief counselors as he mutely drives rideshares to get by. A series of encounters with various passengers leads him inevitably to a moment of emotional reckoning. And that's that. Had Harriman trusted his audience a bit more and avoided a handful of cumbersome sentimental devices — in particular, a flashback montage of Dayo's family — this film might have proven more impactful. As it stands, it tells an important story credibly well. That it adds nothing new

to our collective understanding of the carnage besetting us in no way discredits the validity of its concerns, nor its passion in representing the wages of loss.

Invincible is a Canadian short film (30 min.; in French with subtitles) inspired by the tragic true story of a childhood friend of writer/director Vincent René-Lortie. It is easily the most personal entry among all the nominees, a melancholy tone poem about doomed youth that largely avoids the narrative hammer-blows that can define such efforts. Léokim Beaumier-Lépine gives a powerhouse performance as Marc-Antoine Bernier, a troubled teen doing time in youth detention for unspecified crimes. Scenes of tenderness with his family while on a weekend furlough are counterpoised against the claustrophobic squeeze of Bernier's imprisonment, as we begin to behold the gentle, poetic young man hidden away behind an institutional mask of anger and despair.

Social justice is not the point here, though certainly the inhumanity of the penal system is on full display; René-Lortie is more intent on capturing the strangled cocoon of Bernier's desire for liberation — a desire leading him to a decision that seals his fate. The movie transcends its own specific trappings to become a kind of mythic elegy to all lives cut short.

And then there's Wes Anderson. What can you say about Wes Anderson? Wes Anderson is just so Wes

Anderson, perhaps the most mannered and instantly recognizable stylist since Stanley Kubrick, though the two directors are otherwise separated by the gulf that separates earnestness from irony. As that rare individual who neither adores nor loathes Anderson, I am perhaps well positioned to assess his work. I actually loved his most recent film, *Asteroid City*, and I especially love his Oscar-nominated short, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (U.S.; 39 min.). This adaptation of a tale by Roald Dahl, a story-within-a-story-within-a-story that is at once whimsical and weighty, is custom-made for the twee distancing techniques and pop-up-bookish fantasia typically employed by Anderson.

In fact, it's a match made in heaven. The rapid-fire story of a rich man who learned to cheat at cards in order to become yet richer, and the consequences he suffers therein, Henry Sugar is as earthy and cotton candy as its titular character's name implies. Despite the film's relative brevity (clocking in at twice the usual length of nominees, though), this might be Anderson's finest work to date — a delectable and iconically representative amuse-bouche that goes down quick and easy, but fills you with an infinite sense of wonder for a good spell afterward.

This year's Oscar-nominated live-action, animated and documentary shorts are playing at the Metro Cinemas; for dates and times, visit Metro-cinemas.com.

Blood, Guts and Bambi?

BAMPIRE GIVES BAMBI A KILLER TRANSFORMATION IN THE LATEST FILM COMING OUT OF EUGENE

By Emerson Brady

Bambi, the sweet Disney star, is getting a makeover — hopefully in time for Halloween — complete with fangs that could kill in the upcoming movie *Bampire*, thanks to a local filmmaker who has teamed up with an assortment of film industry talents.

Zoe Wassman has transformed innocent Bambi into a part fawn, part vampire, terrorizing those who dare to go searching for it. And she believes her monster, Bampire, has the potential to make Eugene the next Hollyweird.

"I think this film is going to be the next household name that comes out of Eugene," Wassman says.

Bampire is the first project to come out of Wassman's local production company, PATH Films. After coming up with the premise for *Bampire*, she says that she knew it would be the perfect first film for PATH to produce. She wasn't the only one who saw potential for the film, and before she knew it, *Bampire* grabbed the attention of Diane Franklin from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* and Greg Sestero from *The Room*. Both star in the new film. *The Room* is a cult favorite for being so absolutely bad.



COURTESY ZOE WASSMAN

"A lot of people read it and fell in love with it, and from that point on, I couldn't get it out of their grasp," Wassman says of her script. "It was one of those things where the fire just started catching, and when they read it, they wanted to be a part of it."

This horror comedy puts a dark spin on the original novella *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* by Felix Salten. Set in the '90s, the film follows a recently divorced community college biology professor who becomes obsessed with finding the Siberian musk deer, aka Bampire, after finding evidence of the deer's existence locally. After sharing his newfound passion with his class, he convinces a group of ragtag community college students to venture into the woods, which in this case happens to be a little outside Veneta, and find Bampire. Bloody comedic chaos ensues.

Actor and co-producer Malachite Saaquya says that part of the reason the script resonated so much with people was because it is a slasher film that focuses just as much on character development as it does gore.

Saaquya says, "It's like you expect it to be kind of cliché and cheaply made and just sort of thrown together, but it's not that at all. It's elevated."

One element that Wassman and Saaquya are particularly excited about is the use of animation and VHS camcorder footage throughout the movie. Wassman was able to recruit hand-drawn animator Josh Stifter, known for his work in the film *Tusk*, to animate parts of the film that may be too expensive and time-consuming to attempt with real actors.

Inspired by the *Blair Witch Project*, the camcorder footage adds to the suspense of certain scenes while also cementing us audience members in the '90s world *Bampire* takes place in.

Wassman says, "The idea of trying to make a story like this at all budget levels is insane. And so the fact that, like, 20 other insane people were, like, 'Sure, we'll participate in that. We'll even volunteer our time for large portions of the project just because we believe in it.'"

Bampire has mostly wrapped up shooting and is now in the process of crowdfunding so they can finish the film. Wassman says that they're looking to raise at least \$25,000 to finish production, receive a master color grade, an immersive sound mix, hand-drawn animation and hopefully the rights to use a '90s tune or two for the soundtrack. If the film can meet its crowdfunding goal promptly, Wassman and Saaquya hope for a release date of Halloween 2024.

While Wassman and Saaquya hope that *Bampire* will be their big break, they say they mostly want the film to put Eugene on the map as a place where filmmaking can thrive.

"The local talent and crew that we have here is chomping at the bit. They are ready for the next big thing," Wassman says. "That's how inspired people are here. They are looking for a bigger opportunity than they've had access to."

To contribute or learn more about Bampire go to [Indiegogo.com/projects/bampire-new-bambi-horror-movie](https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/bampire-new-bambi-horror-movie)

Where Eagles Rest

HIKE TO A LOOKOUT AND SHELTER NEAR EUGENE

By William L. Sullivan

Despite Eugene’s tree-hugging reputation, there is no Wilderness Area within 50 miles — pretty much a record for Oregon cities. The best candidate to improve that dismal statistic is Hardesty Mountain’s undesignated wilderness, just 20 miles from town. Check it out with two short hikes from the same trailhead — a 0.7-mile climb to the viewpoint atop Eagles Rest and a 0.4-mile stroll down through old-growth woods to the Ash Swale Shelter.

The trailhead I’m going to recommend is on a paved, one-lane backroad that’s popular in summer with hikers headed to Mount June, a more famous summit in the Hardesty Mountain area. Mount June won its name because snow can block the trail there until June.

Eagles Rest is lower, at 3,022 feet of elevation. Even if a winter storm sweeps through in spring, as it did when I last visited, you’ll probably be able to drive to the trailhead on bare pavement. If you do find snow, it will be only in the last mile, so you could park and walk the rest of the way. A skiff of snow on the trees makes the hike even prettier.

To drive there from Eugene, take Interstate 5 south to exit 188A (for Oakridge), follow Willamette Highway 58 east for 11.4 miles to Dexter Dam, and turn right on Lost Creek Road.

Pause at this turnoff to notice the historic buildings on either hand. To the right is the Cascade Foothills Library, a volunteer project inspired in part by Ken Babbs, the Ken



Photo by William Sullivan

Kesey sidekick and Merry Prankster author who holds a library card with the number one. To the left is the Dexter Lake Club, the shabby red pub featured as a getaway for derelict frat boys in the cult classic movie “Animal House” and the current home of the Rattlesnake BBQ.

Stick to Lost Creek Road for 3.7 miles. Then watch sharp for a somewhat hidden blue sign for Eagles Rest Road on the left. Turn left across a bridge, follow a narrow paved road 5.7 miles, and park in a small parking lot on the right. The only marker is a tiny hiker-symbol sign where the trail to Eagles Rest begins.

The trail zigzags up through a Douglas-fir forest. The trees up here don’t seem very big, but they’ve never been cut. At the top, on a rock bluff surrounded by manzanita bushes, a single concrete pier remains from the 1922 fire

lookout building. The view sweeps from Mount June across the clearcuts of commercial timberland (outside the National Forest) to the farms of the Lost Creek Valley and the South Eugene hills.

When you get back to the trailhead you’ll have hiked only 1.4 miles. Why not add a short stroll to a historic shelter? Simply walk across the road to find a trail that descends gradually through a forest of much bigger, 5-foot-diameter trees.

After 0.4 miles the path crosses Ash Swale, a bog where skunk cabbage put up huge, stinky yellow blooms in May. This seems an unlikely place for a shelter, but in the 1930s it was a stopover and watering place for horseback rangers on their way to the fire lookouts at Eagles Rest, Mount June and Hardesty Mountain.

After the original shelter was bisected by fallen trees, it was rebuilt in 1999. It’s still in good shape and open to the public for overnight use. I wouldn’t recommend it for more than a picnic stop. There’s no stove or firewood, so the three-sided hut would be a cold, damp place to camp in spring.

When I hiked there recently with Scott Hovis, a veteran trip leader for the Obsidians outdoor club, he said he couldn’t remember if he’d been there

before. I pointed to the letters “HOVIS” scratched onto a roof beam with charcoal.

“Don’t do that,” I told him. He blushed.

Take only memories. Leave no trace. That’s the code of the wilderness, a mantra that is meant to preserve natural places where we are visitors, without the distractions of civilization. These are sacred preserves where we must be careful to leave no mark, so that others can see the world in all its untouched glory.

Why does Eugene have no designated wilderness nearby? Hike to Eagles Rest and the Ash Swale Shelter. Then ask that question again.

William L. Sullivan is the author of 23 books, including The Ship In The Woods and the updated 100 Hikes Series For Oregon. Learn more at OregonHiking.com.

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Plummeting into the Afterlife

OCT'S 'RIDE THE CYCLONE' IS THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN ON STAGE IN EUGENE THIS YEAR

By Bob Keefer

MADELINE BRAUN AS OCEAN O'CONNELL ROSENBERG

As the lights come up on this brilliant little musical that opened March 1 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre, we learn that six members of the St. Cassian High School chamber choir have just died in a gruesome accident on the Cyclone, a roller coaster in a shabby amusement park in the stark northern Canada mining town of Uranium, Saskatchewan.

But instead of being just plain dead, they all now inhabit a carnival-like limbo, where they're overseen by the robotic Amazing Karnak, played with dour precision from a mechanical fortune-telling booth by Lee Vogt.

As we meet the students, one at a time, we learn from Karnak that they have a possible path back to the life they all lost when the Cyclone suddenly derailed from its tracks at the apex of the loop-the-loop and plummeted to the ground.

More precisely, Karnak explains, exactly one of the six dead choristers will be allowed to return to life — the one who secures a unanimous vote by all six students following an afterlife talent contest.

Thus begins a fast-paced, funny, sad and utterly engaging show, presented in a single 90-minute act, that will leave you breathless with its rapid-fire and increasingly obscure cultural allusions — remember the smiling teens

of “Up With People,” anyone?

Ride the Cyclone, by Canadians Jacob Richmond and Brooke Maxwell, is the second in Richmond's proposed trilogy of “Teen Scream” plays (the first was *Legoland*); it premiered in 2008 in Victoria, British Columbia, came to the States in 2015 via Chicago Shakespeare, and reached off-Broadway at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in 2016. Since then it's become a cult favorite thanks to viral popularity on TikTok.

In the play, the talent contest has lurid overtones of reality TV and voting people off the island, but it also serves to bring out deep facets of each of the dead children's personalities as they sing about their lives and offer their earnest monologues in hopes of getting home.

The entitled Ocean O'Connell Rosenberg (Madeline Braun) leads off the contest, explaining why she is the obvious choice to be sent back since she's the smartest, most talented and hardest working among them. From there we wind our way through the cast of 21st century adolescent character types, all more or less founded on personal trauma: Constance (Annie Craven) is a shy girl, the bff sidekick to Ocean; Mischa (Matthew Michaels) is a hard-drinking bro, and Ukrainian, too; Ricky (Ethan Kemper) spent much of his life mute and isolated, but is now over-compensating with hyper affection; and Noel (Avery Eberardo) is sweetly — and, we learn, sometimes

flamboyantly — gay.

But the most compelling performance, without a doubt, comes from Laura Tuffli as Jane Doe, the accident's unidentified victim, an unknown choir member who was decapitated and whose head was never recovered. Jane appears in this production as an aggressively punk young woman carrying a beheaded doll and unable to recall anything about her life. In the talent show she brings an electrifyingly operatic voice to bear on the poignant “Ballad of Jane Doe,” the song that exploded on TikTok. In it she pleads with St. Peter to at least let her know who she was: “Oh, no soul, and no name/ And no story, what a shame/ Cruel existence was only a sham?”

OCT's Producing Artistic Director Craig Willis directs a cast that is uniformly excellent. The carnival/steampunk scenery design is by Jeffrey Cook; tight and interesting choreography is by Alexander Holmes.

I won't spoil the plot by divulging the contest winner. I will say this: Get your tickets now. Once word gets around town how good it is, *Cyclone* could easily sell every seat in its brief three-weekend run. Do take your high school age kids, who will love it; you might want to leave the youngsters at home, though they probably would love it as well.

Ride the Cyclone runs through March 17 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre, 194 W. Broadway. Tickets and more info at OCTheatre.org.

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EUGENE Weekly

FREE WILL ASTROLOGY

BY ROB BREZSNY

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): I will never advise you to dim the flame of your ambition or be shy about radiating your enthusiasm. For the next few weeks, though, I urge you to find ways to add sap, juice and nectar to your fiery energy. See if you can be less like a furnace and more like a sauna; less like a rumbling volcano and more like a tropical river. Practically speaking, this might mean being blithely tender and unpredictably heartfelt as you emanate your dazzling glow.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): Some spiritual traditions tell us that the path to enlightenment and awakening is excruciatingly difficult. One teaching compares it to crossing a bridge that's sharper than a sword, thinner than a hair and hotter than fire. Ideas like these have no place in my personal philosophy. I believe enlightenment and awakening are available to anyone who conscientiously practices kindness and compassion. A seeker who consistently asks, "What is the most loving thing I can do?" will be rewarded with life-enhancing transformations. Now I invite you to do what I just did, Taurus. That is, re-evaluate a task or process that everyone (maybe even you) assumes is hard and complicated. Perform whatever tweaks are necessary to understand it as fun, natural and engaging.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): Do you have a relative your parents never told you about? If so, you may find out about them soon. Do you have a secret you want to keep secret? If so, take extra caution to ensure it stays hidden. Is there a person you have had a covert crush on for a while? If so, they may discover your true feelings any minute now. Have you ever wondered if any secrets are being concealed from you? If so, probe gently for their revelation, and they just may leak out. Is there a lost treasure you have almost given up on finding? If so, revive your hopes.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Cancerian poet Pablo Neruda wrote this to a lover: "I want to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees." That sounds very romantic. What does it mean? Well, the arrival of spring brings warmer soil and air, longer hours of sunlight and nurturing precipitation. The flowers of some cherry trees respond by blooming with explosive vigor. Some trees sprout upward of 4,000 blossoms. Maybe Neruda was exaggerating for poetic effect, but if he truly wanted to rouse his lover to be like a burgeoning cherry tree, he'd have to deal with an overwhelming outpouring of lush beauty and rampant fertility. Could he have handled it? If I'm reading the upcoming astrological omens correctly, you Cancerians now have the power to inspire and welcome such lavishness. And yes, you can definitely handle it.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): Speaking on behalf of all non-Leos, I want to express our gratitude for the experiments you have been conducting. Your willingness to dig further than ever before into the mysterious depths is exciting. Please don't be glum just because the results are still inconclusive and you feel a bit vulnerable. I'm confident you will ultimately generate fascinating outcomes that are valuable to us as well as you. Here's a helpful tip: Give yourself permission to be even more daring and curious. Dig even deeper.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEPT. 22): Unexpected mixtures are desirable, though they may initially feel odd. Unplanned and unheralded alliances will be the lucky wild cards if you are willing to set aside your expectations. Best of all, I believe you will be extra adept at creating new forms of synergy and symbiosis, even as you enhance existing forms. Please capitalize on these marvelous openings, dear Virgo. Are there parts of your life that have been divided, and you would like to harmonize them? Now is a good time to try. Bridge-building will be your specialty for the foreseeable future.

LIBRA (SEPT. 23-OCT. 22): Many of you Libras have a special talent for tuning into the needs and moods of other people. This potentially gives you the power to massage situations to serve the good of all. Are you using that power to its fullest? Could you do anything more to harness it? Here's a related issue: Your talent for tuning into the needs and moods of others can give you the capacity to massage situations in service to your personal aims. Are you using that capacity to its fullest? Could you do anything more to harness it? Here's one more variation on the theme: How adept are you at coordinating your service to the general good and your service to your personal aims? Can you do anything to enhance this skill? Now is an excellent time to try.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Psychologist Carl Jung said, "One of the most difficult tasks people can perform is the invention of good games. And this cannot be done by people out of touch with their instinctive selves." According to my astrological assessment, you will thrive in the coming weeks when you are playing good, interesting games. If you dream them up and instigate them yourself, so much the better. And what exactly do I mean by "games"? I'm referring to any organized form of play that rouses fun, entertainment and education. Playing should be one of your prime modes, Scorpio! As Jung notes, that will happen best if you are in close touch with your instinctual self — also known as your animal intelligence.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): Can Sagittarians ever really find a home they are utterly satisfied with? Are they ever at peace with exactly who they are and content to be exactly where they are? Some astrologers suggest these are difficult luxuries for you Centaurs to accomplish. But I think differently. In my view, it's your birthright to create sanctuaries for yourself that incorporate so much variety and expansiveness that you can feel like an adventurous explorer without necessarily having to wander all over the earth. Now is an excellent time to work on this noble project.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): You picked Door No. 2 a while back. Was that the best choice? I'm not sure. Evidence is still ambiguous. As we await more conclusive information, I want you to know that Door No. 1 and Door No. 3 will soon be available for your consideration again. The fun fact is that you can try either of those doors without abandoning your activities in the area where Door No. 2 has led you. But it's important to note that you can't try *both* Door No. 1 and Door No. 3. You must choose one or the other. Proceed with care and nuance, Capricorn, but not with excessive caution. Your passwords are *daring sensitivity* and "discerning audacity."

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): My second cousin has the same name as me and lives in Kosice, Slovakia. He's a Slovakian-speaking chemical engineer who attended the Slovak University of Technology. Do we have anything in common besides our DNA and names? Well, we both love to tell stories. He and I are both big fans of the band Rising Appalachia. We have the same mischievous brand of humor. He has designed equipment and processes to manufacture products that use chemicals in creative ways, and I design oracles to arouse inspirations that change people's brain chemistry. Now I invite you, Aquarius, to celebrate allies with whom you share key qualities despite being quite different. It's a fine time to get maximum enjoyment and value from your connections with such people.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): My Piscean friend Jeff Greenwald wrote the humorous but serious book *Shopping for Buddhas*. It's the story of his adventures in Nepal as he traveled in quest of a statue to serve as a potent symbol for his spiritual yearning. I'm reminded of his search as I ruminate on your near future. I suspect you would benefit from an intense search for divine inspiration — either in the form of an iconic object, a pilgrimage to a holy sanctuary or an inner journey to the source of your truth and love.

Homework: See a compendium of my Big-Picture Forecasts for you in 2024: [Tinyurl.com/BigPicture2024](https://tinyurl.com/BigPicture2024).

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CHECK OUT EXPANDED WEEKLY AUDIO HOROSCOPES AND DAILY TEXT MESSAGE HOROSCOPES.

SAVAGE LOVE

BY DAN SAVAGE



Would it be inappropriate to introduce my girlfriend to the kink/swinger scene if I plan to break up with her? I've been unhappy for a decade, but I've been able to fake the funk until pretty recently. I've been failing at that lately, and the lack of sex is making her unhappy, as she has a huge sexual appetite. I'm considering joining a kink/swinger club to satisfy her needs while I'm unable. I'm honestly turned on by the idea of watching her with someone else and I've told her this, but she worries that the reality of seeing me with someone else will be too much for me and it'll damage our relationship. Which means, if I do get her to join the kink/swinger club and break up with six months later, she'll assume I broke up with her because seeing her with someone else broke me somehow. I don't want her to think she made a mistake by going to a sex club with me. The real reason we are still together is that our child — legally her child (and now legally an adult) — is in a special program only offered through the school system in our ritzy suburb. This program is preparing him to live independently. I'm also working to pay off the credit card debt she built up over the years, so she can actually afford to live on her own once we split. The plan is to have her debt paid off by the time he graduates and then asking her to move out. In the meantime, I'd like her to be sexually satisfied. And while I'm no longer attracted to her, she is a sweet person and I want the best for her.

— Long Over And Done

Well, you could point to the publication of your letter in my column prior to your visit to the kink/swinger club with your girlfriend — provided you can convince your girlfriend to visit that kink/swinger club — as proof that going to the kink/swinger club didn't doom your relationship. That will likely be cold comfort to your girlfriend, FOOF, but the existence of this letter demonstrates that the breakup was thoroughly premeditated.

OK, saying something was premeditated sounds bad, I realize, but it's a positive in the context of being dumped by a long-term partner. It always sucks to get dumped, of course, and the realization your ex was planning to dump you for months or years can add to the humiliation and pain. But no one wants to get dumped at the worst possible time, e.g., right before a big family event or when they're finishing their dissertation or when their credit is in the toilet and their kid's future hangs in the balance. So, an ex who held off until the blow would be a little less devastating did us a favor, even if it's hard to admit or even recognize.

So, LOAD, making sure your girlfriend's debt is paid off and that her son (your son) gets the best possible start before you end things is absolutely the right thing to do — and good on you — but I'm not convinced the kink/swinger club proposal is coming from the same altruistic place. Still, if you think convincing her to attend a kink/swinger club with you might actually revive your sex life — if you can convince her that seeing her with someone else would make you wanna fuck her again (and it might) — it's still a somewhat/semi-noble goal and I will allow it.

And, hey, if kink/swinger clubs do wind up reviving your sex life... and if your sex life is your only point of conflict (it's the only problem you mention in your letter)... maybe you don't need to break up after all?

I'm at the point in my life where I'm both a caregiver for my parents and my partner. All three have various physical and mental disabilities, and none of them is going to get any better. It's exhausting. I don't have an open relationship with my partner, although I'd like to practice ethical non-monogamy. The problem is, he would probably not give permission out of fear I would leave him for someone else, and then where would he be? I know you've gotten lots of letters lately from married people in the same boat, but we are not married. Never did that. Never wanted that. So, there are no vows here to break, no promise of lifetime commitment to walk back. But I can't leave him, because he needs me — as his caretaker, as his patient advocate, and as his companion. But I want the opportunity to get needs of mine met that he can't meet anymore. It feels so unfair that I have to sacrifice everything right now. I want permission, I guess, to do what I need to do to stay with him and stay sane, without feeling like an awful person. I should be less of a coward and talk to him about this, I guess, but I'm afraid of hurting him. He doesn't deserve more pain than he's in already. Thank you for listening.

— American Caregiver Has Intense Needs

Ask the average person to describe a "cheater," and they'll describe selfish assholes who fuck other people behind the backs of their loving, faithful and willing partners they left at home. And, yes, some cheaters are pieces of shit who betray their partners without remorse and don't care about the pain they inflict. But that's not true in every case. In fact, some people who cheat — or some people who write to sex-advice columnists seeking permission to cheat — care deeply about their partners and want to spare them pain. Which is definitely the case here.

Do what you need to do to stay married and stay sane, ACHIN, be discreet and vigilant, and don't let anyone make you feel like you're an awful person. You're a good person in awful circumstances who's doing her best to take care of the people she loves, herself included.

And everybody else: If you're lucky enough to have a partner and you're still relatively young and in good health, now is the time have a talk about your expectations if and/or when — and it's most likely when — your relationship looks a lot less like it does now and a lot more like ACHIN's relationship.

My husband and I have been married for 13 years. We've always been kinky, but we've been monogamous this entire time. For the past few years, we've fantasized about having a MFM threesome. We met a new friend last year and we both felt comfortable asking him to be our third. He agreed, but he takes relationships — especially sexual ones — very slow. He said he would like to have some discussions regarding expectations, boundaries and desires. This level of care makes us feel even more attracted to him. Our issue is that we are growing more deeply attracted to him with each conversation. We talk at least every other day, and we all see each other at least twice a week. We feel like we could fall in love with this person. Are these feelings we should convey to him prior to the threesome? Should we keep this to ourselves and see how the sex goes? What is happening, Dan???

— This Hottie Is Really Delightful

What's happening here? You and your husband have a crush on your first potential third, THIRD, which is wonderful. But for now, you need to keep this — the intensity of your feelings — to yourselves. You can tell this guy you're into him, you can tell him you're ready to fuck when he is, but you can't — or shouldn't — tell him hard you're falling for him. At this early stage, THIRD, you can't know whether those feelings are genuine. Also, not blurring out "I love you" on impulse is one way adults let other adults know they have good judgment and are capable of self-regulation. For now, THIRD, enjoy that feeling, ride that wave and/or the dick, and wait to see if those feelings deepen after you start fucking.

Got problems? Yes, you do. Send your question to mailbox@savage.love! Podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.

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